

# **Knights Templars; Ranks, Organization, Armor, Tactics and Daily life**

**By**

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## **Grand Master**

This office was for life, and the Grand Master was in charge of the entire Order, worldwide. Throughout history, a couple of men retired from the position of Grand Master with the Popes permission, but for the most part dying was the only way out of the job!

## **Master and Commander**

The Master and Commander was the local commander in charge of the commandery — a small Templar “city” and stronghold. He had complete command in the field.

## **Seneschal**

The Seneschal was the right-hand man for the Master and was sometimes called a Grand Commander. In peace, the Seneschal administered all the lands belonging to the chapter house. In war, he handled the movement of the men, the pack trains, the food procurement, and other issues of moving an army.

## **Turcopolier**

This officer was the third in line militarily. He was in command of the light cavalry and the Sergeant brothers (see below).

## **Marshal**

The Marshal was in charge of all arms, as well as all horses. He was very much a military man, and a Master would usually consult with him, as well as the Seneschal and the Turcopolier, before making any final decisions on tactics.

## **Under-Marshal**

The first officer under the Marshal, the Under-Marshal was in charge of the lesser equipment, bridles, padding for saddles, barrels of water, and other supply

problems. He held a very important position in battle because he held the piebald banner, a flag at the head of all, to keep stragglers together.

### **Standard Bearer**

Also called the Confanonier, the Standard Bearer was in charge of the Squires (see below). He was their paymaster, their disciplinarian, and the man who checked over their very important work of keeping the knights' horses and weapons in good order. He didn't actually "bear the standard" in battle — he marched in front of the banner and led his marching column.

### **Knight**

The knight was the backbone of the battlefield. Knights were the equivalent of the cavalry. A small force of knights was very powerful, skilled in warfare, clad in armour, able to take on a large number of foot soldiers. Only a man whose father and grandfather both had been knights could become one, and if he were caught lying about his lineage, the penalty was severe.

The knights dressed in the famous white habit adorned with a red cross. There was no mistaking a Templar knight on the battlefield. Hair was cut short, but knights were forbidden to shave their beards, probably in keeping with the Muslim belief that a beard was a sign of greater masculinity. No sense giving your enemies a reason not to respect you.

### **Sergeant**

Usually from a lower social class than the more noble knights, the Sergeant was still a light cavalry officer, the chief support officer for the knight. Sergeants dressed in a black tunic and a black or brown mantle, often with a red cross.

### **Treasurer**

The Treasurer's duties are clear — this was the guy who kept the books.

### **Draper**

The Draper was in charge of all the clothing and bed linen of everyone in the Order. He also had the power to oversee every one of every rank, and to chastise them if their clothing was not proper for their position, or if anything decorated it, such as a collar of fur on a knight's white robe or mantle.

## **Squires**

Squires were the young men who, just like in the movies, were there to assist the knight in any way possible, from polishing his weapons to feeding his horses. The difference for a Templar Squire is that this was often a hired position, especially in the first hundred years of the Order. It was only later that many Squires were there specifically to test themselves and their mettle and to climb to the order of Knight.

## **Lay Servants**

Lay Servants could run the gamut, from masons brought in to do building or repair work to personal servants to an officer. The hierarchical statutes of the Templar Rule laid out precisely how many of such servants each officer was allowed to have. For a Templar to have too many would be a sin of pride.

## **Chaplain brothers**

One of the most important positions within a Templar commandery was that of the Chaplain brother. The job came with many delicate layers of meaning. He was sort of the internal priest for the Order. He had the power to hear confessions and to give absolution for sins. In fact, Templars were forbidden to say their confession to anyone else without a papal dispensation, which simply means special permission from the pope. This is a very important point, because in effect, what the pope did was to make the Templars spiritually, as well as politically, independent from the rest of the Church. They were not answerable to local clerics or bishops, but only to the pope.

## **Commanders of the Lands**

Jerusalem, Antioch and Tripoli! These Templar officers operated much like a Baillie and operated under the Masters. Commanders were responsible for all Templar houses, castles and farms in their jurisdiction.

The personal retinue of the Commanders consisted of two squires, two foot soldiers, one sergeant, one deacon and one Saracen scribe. Like others, the Commander had four horses at his command as well as one palfrey (riding horse).

## **Provincial Masters**

Provincial Masters, who governed the western districts, were similar to the Commanders of Lands, but seem to have largely been responsible for managing revenue and recruiting new men to the Order.

## Templar Offices

Templar offices were called bailies, meaning something entrusted to someone. It's the root word for the more familiar term of bailiff.

### Armour, tactics and daily life

The following section describes the Templars array of armour protection:

The Templar in battle wore a mail shirt underneath his white habit, with additional armoured padding on the shoulders and feet. On his head he wore a chain-mail helmet with an additional solid metal helm on top of that. On his legs he wore sheepskin britches which he was required to keep on at all times (In the heat of the Jerusalem sun that must have guaranteed chastity) they later wore chain- mail as added protection to the legs.

For defence he carried a rounded kite shaped shield emblazoned with the Beasant (or with the red cross.)

The following section describes the Templars armoury:

A Templar's main weapon was a large straight double-sided sword (a completely different design to the Turkish blade which was a slightly curved, flexible scimitar). His secondary weapon was a Turkish mace, principally a stick with a heavy spiked ball on the end. He also carried a long dagger about his belt and also two smaller knives. There were two different designs that Templar's used for their battle standard, the Beasant, one consisted simply of two vertical blocks one white one black, the other depicted the Templar cross on a chequered black and white background:

The black section symbolized the sin and evil of the ordinary world that the Knights had left to join the order. The white section was symbolic of the transition of darkness into light, sin into purity.

**Their battle cry was “Vive Dieu, Saint Amour” which means “God lives, Saint love”**

A favoured method of fighting the enemy used by the Knights Templar was to fight on horseback (the word knight means 'soldier on horseback'). They rode little fighting stallions, selected for power, weight and a broad flat back that could easily support a knight wearing full mail armour. They used deep saddles with long stirrups so the rider could be wedged firmly into place with their lances braced under their arms. Upon attacking the enemy, the Templars charged as one unit, riding in formation and expecting to demolish him by sheer power. This method was extremely effective against foot soldiers. Each Knight on horseback had a sergeant in front of him carrying his lance and one behind leading a spare horse, when battle ensued they both retreated to a safe distance.

Maintaining a permanent fighting force in the Holy Land was an extremely expensive task.

In the latter half of the 12th Century a single knight needed about 300 hectares (750 acres) to equip and maintain himself as a mounted warrior. By about 1260 he could not manage on less than 1500 hectares.

Horses, a per-requisite for a knight, were extremely expensive at around  $\text{œ}7$ . This price tripled between 1140 and 1180 and doubled again by 1220. Good equipment was also costly – by the mid-13th Century a helm cost between 16 and 32 shillings, chain-mail cost around 120 shillings. Add this together with the cost of sword and shield the initial outlay was something like 200 shillings – easily a year's income.

To support this kind of expenditure the Knights Templar built up and maintained an extensive network of houses, called preceptors, in the West. Without these preceptors the Order would have been quickly wiped out or, as the Order of Montjoie was in 1196, taken over with their first major defeat.

The preceptors provided enough resources for the deployment of around 300 knights in the Kingdom of Jerusalem plus the building, maintaining and garrisoning of major strongholds such as 'Atlit, Tortosa and Safad. The land governed by the preceptors was donated to the Templars by rulers wishing to join the Order, and after receiving their Holy Rule in 1128 the number of new recruit's sky rocketed.

When Templar properties are plotted on a map patterns appear that suggest that, within certain limits, the Order attempted to create a structure. Preceptors seem to cover all the major land routes and access to major ports. Routes from England to France along the Rhone and Saone vales to the provincial coast, across the Alps to Venice, central Italy and Rome and the Angevin kingdom are well covered. The Order maintained preceptors in all major ports along the Atlantic coast and Channel in Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Nantes and Dover. To start with, a large proportion of Templar holdings were based in France, but by the mid-13th Century properties in Italy and Spain increased considerably, especially once the Apulian and Sicilian ports were established.

The extent to which the Order was involved in land management can be seen in the survey the English Templars carried out during the years between 1185 and 1190. Using information collected through local juries they made a detailed record of the extent and value of their properties throughout England.

This extensive survey seems to have been prompted by the growing threat of Saladin's forces in the Holy Land calling for a greater need of a more accurate and detailed knowledge of Templar holdings. Estates were controlled by the preceptor where the Templars and their associates residing as a community. In many cases smaller Templar houses seemed to be grouped around the largest preceptors in the vicinity. The main preceptors would be manned between 10 to 20 brothers whereas the smaller houses would be home to between 2 to 3 Templars each. A typical preceptor was enclosed by a

wall surrounded by a ditch. The enclosure contained a keep, stables, living quarters, stores and a chapel.

Many Templar churches were circular in construction based upon the layout of the Temple in the Holy City of Jerusalem. The main preceptor was headed by a Commander and a Chaplain, other personnel included Almoners, who were in charge of administration and distribution of alms; a Marshal, in charge of requisitions, buildings and stables and a Steward, in charge of the keys. Other positions, depending on the economic interests of the preceptors included money lender and vendor of wines.

Many Templar preceptors bought and maintained vineyards, orchards, olive groves, pasture lands, and mills as a source of income. Others became dedicated money-lending facilities, setting up the world's first banking system. Templar houses were also used for the protection of important documents such as treaties, charters and wills.

Crusaders or pilgrims making the long journey to the Holy Land could store funds or precious objects in the Templar vaults knowing they would be absolutely safe. Many who set out for the Holy Land made out wills, the Templar's kept them in safe keeping and, if so being, would act as executors of its provisions. By the beginning of the 14th Century the Knights Templar had built up and was maintaining a highly organized network of preceptors all across Europe.